Nation building

Even after the UML-Maoist alliance won a near two-thirds majority in Parliament-Province elections three months ago, not many were sure this would translate into the much promised political stability. Maoist Chair Pushpa Kamal Dahal was providing his UML counterpart KP Oli to take turns at prime ministership, letting down voters who capitulated them to power in the hope that it would end political wrangling once and for all and usher in an era of prosperity. Dahal kept bargaining even after Oli was sworn in as new prime minister on 15 February.

But Dahal made a sudden U-turn this week and agreed to allow Oli to complete his full five-year term. The seven-point unification deal signed by Nepal’s two largest communist parties makes no mention of any rotational prime ministership.

The deal is also silent about Oli and Dahal co-chairing the unified party, but its seventh point states that the general convention will be held harmoniously as a unity convention'. Analysts interpret this to be a tacit understanding that Oli will help Dahal assume leadership of the unified party.

Political analyst Shyam Shrestha says Dahal has decided to put aside his immediate ambition to unify the communist party, but this will ultimately yield him political dividends. “That Dahal will be the ultimate leader of the unified party is a foregone conclusion.”

To summarise: Dahal has let Oli stay in Baburam for a full term in exchange for a commitment to eventually hand over party leadership to him. Technically, this also means Dahal can hope to be prime minister after the next parliamentary polls, but he probably knows it could easily happen before that because of Oli’s poor health.

The UML-Maoist unification may finally ensure stability, but it has also raised a question about what kind of a party will be governing Nepal. Oli and Dahal both launched their political careers using violence, and both have now proven themselves to be shrewd at parliamentary wheeling-dealing as well. Dahal has distanced himself from Marxism, and Oli has not gone back to left extremism. The question now is: will the unified party be more like the UML, or the Maoist? Dahal has climbed halfway up to take the UML saddle, while Oli is still riding.

During his short first tenure in 2015-16, Oli inspired many Nepalis to dream of a Nepal that does not solely depend on India and maintains equidistance with China. He has returned to power as one of Nepal’s strongest prime ministers. He does not need to pay the nationalism card anymore — just work to leave a firm legacy of nation-building.

Om Astha Rai
For Nepal, the past week has been historic at many levels. The prolonged 11-year process of rebuilding has finally come to an end, and the confidence in leadership has been restored. The community has faced several challenges, including political instability and corruption, but the recent development has shown that with the right approach, Nepal can overcome these challenges.

The current situation is also historic because two of Nepal's largest and most significant communities have united to form the Nepal Communist Party. This fact has not only brought the two rival political parties closer but has also brought hope to the people of Nepal. The unity is driven by the desire to move forward and create a better future for all.

In the past few months since the Maoists and the UML made the surprise announcement that they were setting up an electoral alliance, there has been a shift in the political landscape of the country. This shift has been welcomed by the people, who have seen a reduction in political instability and an increase in the focus on development.

Negotiations between the CPN (UML) and the CPN-Maoist have been ongoing for some time, and the formation of the Nepal Communist Party is a significant step towards stabilizing the country's political landscape. This development will hopefully lead to more stable governance and a better future for Nepal.
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From ‘cannot’ to ‘why not’

Far from being helpless, we are creative, imaginative and innovative.

While a section of Nepali society is in the habit of factually declaring: ‘Nepal cannot even make a needle,’ others are dynamically seeking smart solutions to solve Nepal’s challenges.

Startup weekends, incubation hubs and idea competitions are being held regularly in Kathmandu, and even in Nepalgunj and other cities. The social media and its Anando invitations to such events, and we are getting used to approaching angel funders and venture funds.

Maha Kosh’s Nepal Innovation Center also seems to be gathering momentum as resources trickle in from all over the world. At business schools, aspirants are being asked to become self-employed and job creators, not job seekers.

All these activities and initiatives are getting people thinking, designing, pitching, building and piloting, new ideas and solutions. It is shifting the conversation among Nepalis from: ‘cannot’ to ‘why not?’ Real problems have real solutions. A country of nearly 30 million is not a small market. Nepal is increasingly not accepting handouts and do not expect the government to solve their problems. This is the perfect time for Nepal to see if they have what it takes to become an inventor.

A great example of what Nepalis can and have done in the past is the story of the blacksmiths of Baglung who built bridges using an innovative solution of making chain-linked ‘cables’. This was long before steel cables started being imported, which ultimately displaced the amazing bridge and the blacksmiths who built them.

The National Museum in Chautara has a machine gun which Nepali inventors designed and built themselves. There is a family of metal casters in Kathmandu who made the ‘lake bomb’ for the Nepal-Tibet-China war which jumped up and exploded, sowing fear in the enemy ranks. The Phuyshah and Khipuri Khukuri or brass pots from Chisapani and Palpa, show Nepali craftsmanship at its best.

Akkal Man Nakarmi used to manufacture Pelvic turbines in his small workshop in Ghwyapur, while Babalo Yatra Suba craft fishing nets and its indigenously made cross flow turbines to Indonesia and the Philippines. Nepal has for generations channelised water through theirit khola networks to supply water to our temples and buildings. Indus used to come across the border to buy Heladuka, Kavre, and to make phone calls. Just look at our ancient irrigation canals and the urban landscape of Rani Pokhari. We are capable.

Today we need warehouses to store and protect, we need cold storage and refrigerated trucks to link the farm to the market. We need to design hybrid energy systems that combine the source from the sun, local wind and water to give us regular power for 24 hours and 365 days a year. We need to store essential drugs and blood in remote health facilities.

Now that we have regular power supply we need efficient appliances and cleaner transport. We need to reduce our dependency on fossil fuels and make sure every child has access to the digital media. No one is going to spend time and energy to invest in the Nepali market or meet Nepali needs if we don’t do that ourselves.

In Kathmandu Valley there is a tradition where children who do not speak clearly at a young age are taken to the Swayambhunath temple to receive blessings. The problem is that the moment children learn to speak and ask questions, they are told to ‘shut up’. Feudalism comes in many forms and the lack of space to ask questions and challenge the status quo is a big one.

How did we learn to make the best yogurt, pickles to preserve the chilli? How do we make mulberry juice and mokk harnesse? How did we domesticate elephants, learn to distil aromatic plants, and recognise vegetation that heal and provide wellness? Who designed and scaled up the water clients to mill grain all over Nepal? How did we take to new foods like wheat and potatoes, even adopt new technologies like the smart phone so quickly?

It’s time to unleash the inventors in us.

Anil Chitrakar is President of Solaharhi.

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Everest to Annapurna

Takashi Miyazawa was very much aware of his time when he built the high-end Everest View Hotel in Nepal in the 1970s. Now, the Japanese entrepreneur who took Nepal’s climbing world by storm in the 1980s and 80s, is building his dreams in the new Everest View Hotel in Pokhara’s Sarangkot.

The new boutique hotel, situated at 1,400m, offers everything: sunshine, the Annapurna, view of Phewa Lake, serenity, and luxurious accommodations. The hotel is having a soft opening on Friday, introducing its 24 deluxe rooms designed in contemporary style. Breakfast is arranged by Sahara Café, while Sazan Restaurant headed by Chef Grotada Khanal serves Japanese, Nepali, Italian and continental cuisines for lunch and dinner.

“There is nothing in between the hotel and the mountains,” says General Manager Shalmani Sajal who describes the rooms as being unconventionally spacious enough to provide comfort while being surrounded by some of the tallest and most stunning peaks of the Central Himalaya. The hotel is a partnership between Miyazawa and World Air-Sea Service, a Tokyo based travel company, and has a team of 24 employees and staff who are all residents of Sarangkot.

Hotel Annapurna View will also be offering packages for adventure sports such as paragliding, zip-line, ultra lights, bungee jumping, and is planning helicopter sightseeing flights to Annapurna Base Camp.

Upon completion of construction in October, visitors will be able to enjoy spa and pool facilities along with a chance to attend Nepali cooking classes. One of the hotel’s iconic attractions is its glass wall in the lobby framing the Mt Machapuchare. It is easy to understand why Miyazawa always wanted to build a hotel here.

Sikuma Rai
Phone: +977 1 443586

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Insuring more lives

Chief Executive Officer, General Insurance Company Limited, inaugurated a regional office in Bhumaltar, the first office outside Kathmandu. In the presence of its Executive Officer, Purna Bajracharya, 100 of its clients and industry leaders grace the ceremony.

Sikuma Rai
Phone: +977 1 443586

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Filming destinations

Turkish Airlines released a new commercial directed by Martin Aslund during the US Super Bowl. The film will broadcast in Turkish Airlines' various destinations of the airline, showcasing the unique qualities of each nation.

Qatar Airways announced the delivery of its First Airbus A350-1000 at the Airbus Delivery Centre in Toulouse, France.

The film will be broadcast in various Turkish Airlines destinations.

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Turkish Airlines

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Tour to Russia

Coach Tour Operators for Russia has announced its for Russian and Indian cities in November for 2019.

The company offers local tour operators who require financial support to make solar projects more bankable in developing countries.

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Capturing an invisible reality

Laurence Kent Jones was 11 when he first learnt about infrared photography in a second-hand encyclopedia gifted by his father. He was struck by the stark clarity and originality of the images. Ever since, he has been fascinated by the urge to record invisible light in film.

Jones’ collection of black and white and colour photos of Nepal, Bhutan and India called ‘Spectrum’ will be on exhibit at the Siddhartha Art Gallery till 6 March. The works on display play with light that are of a wavelength that the human eye cannot see. Among the 18 photographs displayed, only three are taken in the visible segment of the spectrum while the rest are experiments in the infrared band.

“Photography allows us to see a lot of things that we cannot experience directly,” says Jones, who is deeply interested in the science and technology of photography. “Especially with the development of the digital camera, one might get lost. But the technology is only there to serve the work, not the other way around.” Laurence is from a family of artists, and having a painter father influenced his early childhood. Until his thirties he wasn’t making much money as an artist, so he decided to join the diplomatic service. For 35 years, except for taking souvenir photos of places he travelled to, Jones wasn’t doing any serious photography. He resumed his passion again when he was assigned to directly report from dangerous neighborhoods of Haiti in 2007. He was posted to the US Embassy in Kathmandu two years ago and now after retirement spends time exploring the world through infrared imagery.

In order to take infrared photos, a heat filter needs to block visible light but allow infrared to pass. Through an expensive modification, Jones took the leap six years ago and now carries two cameras: a Canon 5D Mk II for infrared and a Olympus for colour. The exhibition begins with a Langtang landscape (above) taken with infrared film which brings out the valley in all its black and white crispness, the contrasts accentuated by the mat texture of the paper. In infrared, the vegetation reflects light and appears white and this puts the mountains and buildings in sharp contrast. While the first floor of the gallery has only infrared monochromes, the second floor has colour images. Some of the images of Boudhanath, Taleju Temple and Patan Durbar Square could easily have been touristic, but Jones’ images have a stark originality.

A photographer takes responsibility for every picture even if it is accidental, this wasn’t accidental. As an old fashioned photographer I deliberately cut down the light getting to the sensor to get much more moody and evocative pictures,” Jones told us.

There are two captures of Patan Durbar Square, one in colour and another infrared. Jones says the coloured one in this case is a stronger image because the leading lines and vanishing points all converge at a spot close to a woman’s dramatic face which becomes the main focus. Laurence Kent Jones enjoys exploring both visible and infrared light, and its doing so brings us to a whole unseen world that forces us to reflect just how narrow is the visual perception of reality that the human retina can process.

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- **Note**: With Basic Japanese language would be best.

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- **Japan**
  - Name: Badri khadka
  - Mobile: +818030851912
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NATION 5
The art of skateboarding

London-based Nepali illustrator combines his passion for art with sport in post-quake Nepal

As a boy growing up in Kathmandu, Gaurab Thakali says, developed a passion for skateboarding. But due to limited and suitable open spaces, it was very difficult. The only time he could skate was on the empty streets when one or other political party enforced a transport shutdown.

He found that as an adolescent, an outdoor social activity like skateboarding helped him develop life skills, make friends, relieve stress, and provide a social outlet. It taught him the importance of practice and patience, and that actions have consequences.

These traits helped Thakali as he moved to Britain, went to art school and combined his infatuation with skateboarding, jazz and painting to produce vivid prints, silkscreens and paintings. These art works now appear on magazines, designer T-shirts, even on ping pong paddles and skateboards. Thakali’s unique style has made him sought after editorial illustrator with The New Yorker, Skateboard Café and other projects.

“Skateboarding and making art are very similar to a certain extent and both are heavily intertwined in me personally,” explains Thakali in an interview in London this week. “I started skateboarding before I started making art and it was actually being exposed to the visual side of the sport that made me more interested in making art.”

Thakali has been travelling to Kathmandu frequently after the earthquake, and is working on a project to document Nepal after the earthquake, and also to popularize skateboarding in his homeland. He is one of the founding members of Skate Nepal alongside skateboarder and London local Daryl Dominguez, and he has been accompanying on one trip by his friend Tom Dilion, a skateboarder and photographer from London is also researching the skateboarding scene and to support two skateparks in Pokhara with skate hardware donated by UK-based skate communities and brands.

“It’s an interesting skating scene in Nepal, I never thought that it would expand so greatly, there are so many skateboarders in Nepal now,” said Thakali. “It is also nice to see lots of young people, boys and girls getting involved in skateboarding. Definitely a very exciting time for skateboarding in Nepal.”

As conductor of the non-profit Skate Nepal, Thakali wants to make skateboarding more accessible in the country. He travels regularly between the UK and Nepal to see how Skate Nepal’s efforts are incubating in the local scene, while also striving to introduce skateboarding to as many budding skaters as possible.

Thakali is currently fundraising for another skatepark in Nepal, and there is lots of work ahead to plan, get permissions, train staff and have the logistical in place. Asked what his future plans are, Thakali says: “As for me, I am keeping up with making art and working on collaborations with magazines, brands, music artists, etc, keep making what I enjoy the most.”

nepaltimes.com
Go online for picture gallery of Thakali’s work and to watch videos of skateboarding.
Silver Heritage Group (SVH), is a publicly-traded Company listed on the Australian Securities Exchange and owns 100% of Tiger Palace Resort via sole ownership of Tiger One Pvt. Ltd. (TOPCL).

Silver Heritage Group (SVH) has already committed over US$ 55 Million to their projects in Nepal and has created over 1,000 jobs for Nepali citizens. The Group is further committed to making significant additional investments in Nepal and wishes to become a major generator of Nepali GDP.

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- OUTDOOR WEDDING & BANQUET AREA • PROXIMITY TO 2 UNESCO WORLD HERITAGE SITES – LUMBINI AND CHITWAN NATIONAL PARK
- LOCATED 20 MINUTES FROM BHAIRAHAWA AIRPORT, JUST 15 MINUTES FROM THE NEPAL-INDIA BORDER

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Silver Heritage Group Limited: Group Organisation Chart

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Kathmandu’s silent spring

SONIA AWALE

The publication in 1962 of Rachel Carson’s book “Silent Spring” drew public attention to how pesticides had killed much of North America’s songbirds. The book launched an international environmental movement.

A similar silence has descended upon Kathmandu Valley, as once ubiquitous birds like sparrows (Big Photo) and mynahs (right) decline. And ornithologists who have studied this trend say that in Nepal, too, it is the rampant use of pesticides that is mainly to blame.

“Trees have a direct correlation between the increase in pesticide use and the decrease in the number of birds in a neighborhood,” explains Jyotendra Thakur, of Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN).

Pesticides kill insects on which urban birds depend for food. But there are also other factors at play: traditional brick houses in which sparrows found holes to nest are giving way to concrete facades. Air is being replaced by exhaust fumes.

There are fewer trees and vegetation left for the birds.

BCN has been conducting urban bird monitoring in Kathmandu Valley and has counted ever-lower numbers of birds each time. Other common birds like drongo, mynah, red-vented bulbul, owls and even fruit bats are equally hard to find.

The house sparrow, once a bird common in every continent except Antarctica, had to be included in the IUCN list of threatened species in 2002 in the UK after a sudden decline in its population.

In India, there has been as much as 90% decline in sparrow populations in several states. These bird experts have conducted research to find that sparrows are scarcer near mobile phone towers. They believe the electromagnetic radiation repels sparrows and other urban birds.

As in India, mobile phone towers could also be one of the reasons sparrows are disappearing in Kathmandu,” says Vimal Thapa of BCN.

Crows are the other reason for disappearing sparrows as ravens dominate urban ecology and attack young ones of other bird species. Additionally, crows have proliferated because of the Valley’s open garbage and improper management of wastewater.

Since 2010, World Sparrow Day is being observed on 20 March, and this year BCN will be marking the day by urging people to take part in an hour-long sparrow spotting event in their neighbourhoods in order to spread awareness about their declining numbers.

Ornithologist Hem Sagar Birla explains that while sparrows are a worry, there are hundreds of other common urban birds whose populations have declined in recent years, including the drongo, shrikes, owls, mynahs and magpie robins.

Birds deserting our towns and urban areas don’t only indicate their dwindling population,” he added. “It also means the environment we live in isn’t conducive for human beings either.”

1 in every 5 birds in Nepal is listed as a threatened species, compared to 1 in every 8 globally.
Frequent fliers

Loss of wetlands, pesticide use and hunting along migratory routes have led to a steep drop in the number of birds wintering in Nepal, an avian census last month has confirmed.

The census was carried out 6-22 January in Kosi Tappu, Chitwan, Bardia and 58 other protected water bodies and lakes across Nepal. Preliminary data shows a decline in both the number of water birds as well as the variety species spotted [see graph below].

"Each one of the water dependent bird species, both indigenous and migratory, is declining steadily in Nepal," ornithologist Biplav Nepal Roy said. "In fact, one in every five birds in Nepal is listed as a threatened species, compared to one in every eight globally."

Nepal is home to 888 species of birds, of which 216 are migratory and 188 of them are on nationally threatened list. Migratory birds use Nepal's lakes and rivers as stopovers on their traditional migratory routes.

"Nepal is an important stopover for many species, many birds stay on, while others fly on to India," said Vimal Rai, coordinator of the Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN). BCN has set up a chain of seven "wetland restaurants" across the Tarai and mid-hills in an effort to provide the birds with uncontaminated food.

Satellite telemetry shows routes three migratory birds take to cross the Himalaya from Mongolia, via Tibet to Nepal and on to India.

Central Asian Flyway

Koram of Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN) observed that migratory species also stop in Nepal when returning north.

The Steppe Eagle that was found in Saptari last week is one of the few birds that winter in Nepal. The Himalayan Honey Buzzard is another bird that is found in Nepal. The bird was seen in Saptari last year.

Scientists are now using satellite telemetry to collect information on migration timing, speed of flight, route and stopovers along the Central Asian Flyway which traverses the Himalayan mountains. Data show that waterfowl use three main corridors across Nepal to migrate between Mongolia through Tibet to India across western Nepal, over Chitwan and through the Kosi Valley.

Bar-headed geese, for instance, have been tracked by satellite on overnight flights lasting more than 25 hours from Baranov over western Nepal to lakes in Tibet. They stop briefly on the corridor to take advantage of updrafts and then when they need to go over mountains ride the jet stream to push them more rapidly to their destination. They undertake return journeys in autumn before the jet stream reverses so they don't have headwinds.
**Events**

- **Astra Mic Night**
  - Open mic platform for poetry, acoustic music, storytelling and stand-up comedy.
  - 1 March, 6-8pm, Akasha Art center, Fulford (Rs.100/exec.; Rs.150/door).

- **Jarabe de Palo**
  - Spanish singer, songwriter, and guitarist, Pau Dutes, will be performing with his rock group for the night. The musical group has received Premios de la Música, Premios Ondas and Grammy nominations.

- **Japanese film festival**
  - Boulder and The Garden of Eden on Friday and 4 Akin of Samurai Cooking, Blue Story and Moonlighting on Saturday.

- **Kurt**
  - 4 February, 7pm onwards, Purple Ink Rock Bar, Thamel.

- **Roadhouse**
  - Viva Roadhouse for handcrafted salads, sandwiches, desserts and espresso, besides its legendary farmhouse pizza. Try the Greek salad and sliced brownie with ice cream.

- **Fire and Ice Pizzeria**
  - One of the oldest pizzerias in Kathmandu, Fire and Ice continues to serve some of the most delicious pizzas and pastas in town.

- **Alice Restaurant**
  - Step in for scrumptious Thakali, Chinese, Continental, and Nepali cuisine. Give them your baby (Mom Chi and Koro), which is the Thakali version of braided sausage, a try.

- **Base Camp Music Festival**
  - The 2nd edition of Base Camp Music Festival will start with a full-moon party performance by Culshaw & Himalaya, a reggae band from KTM. The festival is a month long event.

- **Evoke Café and Bistro**
  - Evoke is more than just a café serving specialty coffee and food. Try the delectable Chocolate Chip and Banana Pancakes to entice your taste buds.

**Talk Session**

Join talk featuring Kapil Tamar, Managing Partner of White Lotus Center & Chair of the Investment Committee at Business Oxygen, and learn about more investment prospects in Nepal.

23 February, 5pm, Nepal Community Hall, Pratik (Rs.500/30).
ICE TO WATER

Citizen scientists can help monitor the impact of global warming on the Himalaya

C SCOTT WATSON

Mountain environment is rapidly changing. Climate change is leading to warmer temperatures and changing precipitation patterns, directly impacting Himalayan glaciers. Nepal is home to some of the highest glaciers in the world, yet many will diminish to shadows of their former selves in the coming centuries. Glaciers are retreating to pockets of sun hidden refuge, where lower air temperatures prolong their existence in the shade of the high mountains.

The scenery attracts visitors from all over the world, but tourists are transient. It is the Nepalis who call this landscape of extremes their home. While scientific research tries to understand how glaciers will rapidly disappear, working with those affected to mutually share observations and adaptation strategies is now critical.

Glaciers are vast reservoirs of water, pathways to the highest peaks on earth and home to communities of living things. When experiencing their beauty, we should consider their destiny and be proactive towards global strategies to slow the rate of change and engage with sustainable adaptation strategies.

Glaciers are intrinsically linked and indeed shape the mountain environment. In turn, sediment and rock transported onto the surface of debris-covered glaciers shapes their evolution. This insulating layer of rocks and sediment can grow several metres and obscure the moving ice beneath. Yet, the glaciers are shrinking rapidly.

Khubu Glacier is thinned by an average of -1 m per year (1984-2015) where the melting deficit is thinnest close to Everest Base Camp. The spatial distribution of thinning leads to a flatter glacier profile, although local relief can still exceed tens of metres. A flatter glacier is more prone to water ponding on the surface, which can eventually form large glacial lakes.

At Everest Base Camp, the Khumbu Glacier is Bowing down valley at over 30 m per year. Yet there is virtually no movement 7 km further down the glacier adjacent to the village of Lobuche. Exposed ice cliffs and supraglacial ponds on the glacier surface are hot spots of melt. The ponds absorb and transmit thermal energy into the glacier interior, such that the process can become a positive feedback loop, leading to an expanding network of ponds. With a pond at their base, ice cliffs rapidly retreat across the glacier, generating melt water and leaving a trail of fallen debris.

Disappearing glaciers provide new habitat for birds, bees, small mammals, micro-organisms (small critters living in ponds), and occasionally grazing livestock. Vegetation grows where the glaciers slow and the surface stabilizes. Because the wall of sediment and rocks blocking the lake are of unknown stability, downstream communities can be threaten and require close field monitoring and analysis of satellite imagery.

The hydroelectric potential of these lakes could one day be tapped, however, some lakes will inevitably breach their dams and cause downstream flooding, often triggered by large avalanches. Access to water resources will change as snow cover reduces and glaciers disappear, also requiring community adaptation. Therefore, awareness, early warning, and adaptation is key.

There is often a disconnect between scientists, mountain communities, transit mountain visitors, and government and non-government agencies. Science should be open about observed and predicted changes, but also the associated uncertainties.

Open Access publishing allows scientific research to be read by all. Communities can retain vast historical knowledge of previous environmental stresses, and are well placed to describe ongoing changes and their adaptation requirements. Engagement is therefore key for research to be targeted efficiently and used to guide adaptation strategies.

Anyone can volunteer and become a citizen scientist. Communities, mountaineers and tourists can all contribute to targeted data collection and analysis. Communities are well placed for continual observations targeted to local needs, such as stream and river flows, timing of the growing seasons, and documentation of flood events.

Local and international mountaineers access the highest peaks on earth and can bring back snow and rock samples, maintain weather stations, capture repeat photography and provide specialist knowledge of changes in the high-mountain environment. Tourists can also capture repeat photography, and may also have the opportunity to capture aerial imagery from helicopter flights, which can be used to reconstruct the environment in 3D. There are opportunities for everyone to engage in research that is ultimately geared towards improving our understanding of global change and how best to adapt.

C Scott Watson is an environmental research scientist and runs the website BodyGlaiciers.co.uk. Twitter @ScottWatson

HIMALAYAN MELTDOWN: A raft with scientists monitoring the expansion of Thulagi Glacial Lake in Central Nepal (above) dwarfed by the surrounding mountains and water body that has grown alarmingly in the past two decades due to global warming.

An aerial view of Thulagi Glacial Lake (left) shows the fragile marine that block the water. Collapse of these marine dams threatens communities, hydroelectric plants and highways downstream.

There are hundreds of new glaciers (red dots, above) that have emerged in the Nepa Himalaya in the last 30 years. Many of them are growing alarmingly and are in danger of bursting.

GLACIAL LAKES

GLACIERS IN FULL RETREAT

Glenmorangie Lake

Glacier Front 50 years ago

Super glacial ponds

Meltwater channel

Terminal moraine

Supraglacial ponds

Water carried lake

Buddha Gandaki

Kali Gandaki

Sun Koshi Arun

Tamor

Karnali

Kathmandu

CSCOTT WATSON
Black Panther

The soon to be historic new Marvel film, Black Panther is now out in cinemas, and it is as good as they get in terms of the Marvel cinematic universe thus far. Starring a pre-dominantly all-black cast, fittingly, for a film about a fictitious African nation that is the bolder of mysterious, almost magical metal named Vibranium, the film is visually stunning, the cast really quite wonderful, and the plot, somewhat basic.

Luckily this original story does not suffer too much from the slightly banal storyline due to all of the ensemble characters, the special effects, and the novelty of seeing such a stirring array of extremely talented black actors unapologetically on screen, wielding their talent in a much anticipated, long-delayed film that has tried to make it onto the screen since Wesley Snipes first displayed an interest in it in 1992.

Starting the handsome, charismatic Chadwick Boseman as the King of Wakanda, T’Challa, aka the Black Panther, the film follows the crowning of T’Challa after the death of his beloved father. The opening scenes take place against a stunning setting amidst a boulevard of waterfalls, bringing a visually stunning kind of beauty and originality to what might otherwise have been a bland, token ceremony. The fictitious African tribes are portrayed with grace and beauty by the project’s grand eye of the director, Ryan Coogler, the 31-year-old African American director of the great boxing film Creed (2015), who shows his talent and ability without faltering throughout an ambitious film that never stalls.

T’Challa is sided in his story by the lovely Lupita Nyong’o as Nakia, the tough, feisty love of his life whose social conscience is a guiding force for the film. However, even more than Boseman, Nyong’o, or the lovely Angela Bassett, who plays Ramonda, T’Challa’s mother, it is the gorgeous, playful, incredibly watchable Letitia Wright who steals the show as T’Challa’s younger sister and tech geek extraordinary, filling in as Shuri, a sort of female version of “Q” – a character beloved in the Bond films.

There is much to love in Black Panther, but among its treasures, the poor one-dimensional villain is not among them. Spouting the offensive philosophy that Wakanda should make its superior weapons available to all the oppressed people around the world, and mainly the black people who have been given short shrift in North America, Killmonger, played by Michael B. Jordan, rises as an unlikely hero with a truly ridiculous hair-style to a role that is unlearned by his tragic history.

It is a relief to see, and to hope, that long gone are the days where women, and people of colour could not hold, and star in the most ambitious and expensive of Hollywood films. It has been a long time coming, with people like Harvey Weinstein and other similarly disgraceful and deplorable old white men holding the reins to an industry that ought to be as diverse as the films that reach for far wide across the globe. Let us hope that Black Panther becomes an unforgettable Wonder Woman a sign of things to come.

MUST SEE
Sophia Pande
nepaltimes.com
Watch trailer online
Highway rest house

Nikhiljung Rayamajhi in setopati.com, 22 February

Mit Bahadur Khadka, 85, remembers travelers walking to Kathmandu from the east spending the night in the small, white, lime and mustard rest house in Banepa. Porters would rest their loads, light a fire by the rest house and tuck in before they resumed their journey to Kathmandu the next day.

When the Arniko Highway was built in the 1960s, workers including Khadka lived in the house. During hot summer days, Khadka would cool off on the top floor. The rest house was forgotten as the highway replaced the old trail. Today, the building is in a dilapidated condition, further damaged by the 2013 earthquake. The wood on the doors and windows have rotted, it is over-run with weedy inside and outside. But the roof, the stucco decorations and structure are still intact and if restored it could serve as a museum. Built by a local businessman Hari Bhakta Bade and his brother Krishna Bhakta Bade 105 years ago, the two-storey rest house is called Setopati (white resting place). Some even call it Putalipati after the two female figures on the corners of the front façade. It provided shelter to a lot of people at the time. The beautiful and modern design made it the identity of Banepa,” says historian Gyan Kaji Manandhar.

Fumiyasu Shinoda would go to the rest house to play hide-and-seek with her friends or take shelter from the rain in monsoon. Often she would meet new people who were taking a break from their journey.

Once the Arniko Highway was built and travelers stopped coming, it became a spot for drug addicts and beggars. “Some even found dead here, so the locals stopped coming,” says Shinoda.

It served as a polling station during the first Panchayat era elections as well as later ones, and for a time it housed the office of Red Cross.

The rest house is 8m by 5m and has half-a-dozen arched windows and three figures depicting lions and birds on the outer wall. On the inside are wooden platforms for beds and also to store luggage and goods. On the left side of the rest house, there is a stone spout which is still functioning.

“It can be restored with minimum budget,” says Manandhar, “If the wall and the windows can be restored, it will be as good as new.”

Banepa’s new mayor Laxmi Neupane Bade says the municipality is planning to preserve and restore heritage sites: “Development is our first priority but we will look into heritage conservation as well.”

Why Nepal wants to stay poor

Nepali Times, 19 February

The UN would like to declare Nepal as the latest member nation to join the list of the least developed countries (LDCs) category for a few more years. Nepal has officially requested the UN to extend to it the list of Developing Economies just before a meeting in March to review the status of each LDC and forward recommendations to the UN General Assembly.

Nepal fears that it may lose foreign aid if it graduates from LDC status, and argues its economy is still vulnerable to various threats including natural disasters. Nepal recently sent a high-level delegation to New York to lobby with the UN-OHRLLS to not graduate it from the LDC category.

A country has to meet three criteria to graduate from LDC status: at least $724 Gross National Income (GNI) per capita, above 66 score in Human Assets index (HAI) and below 32 score in Economic Vulnerability Index (EVI).

When the UN had last reviewed the status of LDC countries in 2015, Nepal had achieved more than enough 69.1% and EVI (28.2% scores. If Nepal is found to have maintained its HAI and EVI ratings when the UN-OHRLLS meets next month, it will graduate from its LDC category – even if it fails to meet UN’s per capita.

Nepal has increased its literacy and Net Enrollment Rates (NER) sufficiently to maintain its HAI rating, and its EVI ranking has also improved over the last three years because of consistently and export conditions.

But Nepal argues that its per capita was just $682 in 2017, and it will be unable to sustain its HAI and EVI growth unless its national income grows. Nepal has also questioned the methodology of determining EVI rating, arguing its score should be less than was has been determined.

The UN-OHRLLS looks into 12 indicators to determine whether a country’s economy is vulnerable, but it does not consider threats that Nepal’s economy has faced: exhaustion, blockade, flood and landslide. Nepal argues that its economy can be described as safe only without factoring in these threats. Economist Swaminathan Naidu, who headed the World Bank’s National Planning Commission (NPC) for three years, says: “The UN indicators to determine a country’s economic vulnerability were based on African countries in the 70s, which cannot be applicable to Nepal. The UN must re-examine its own indicators before declaring Nepal a developing country.”

As an LDC, Nepal enjoys concessional loans, tax privileges, get technical support to expand its market and money for climate change adaptation. At a time when Nepal is hoping for more foreign aid to support new federal structure, it does not want to lose potential funding by being identified as a developing nation.
A monumental rivalry

Post-quake reconstruction of Kathmandu’s temples is mired in geopolitics

OM ASTHA RAI

When the Malla rulers held sway over Kathmandu Valley, they were constantly trying to outdo each other to build ever more impressive monuments. Many of these structures in Bhaktapur, Patan and Kathmandu were destroyed in the 1934 earthquake. Today, the competition to rebuild the temples is not among the descendants of the Malla kings, but between rival world powers.

Visitors to the Kathmandu valley’s historical palace complex these days have to peruse an elaborate gate festooned with Chinese flags announcing the restoration of the Hanuman Dhoka Palace.

Further on, hanging from the scaffolding of the damaged Gaddhi Bhanjyang stands a large banner with the American eagle spangled with stars and stripes. At the entrance to the palace courtyard, several structures propped up with timber beams, and a relatively smaller billboard with the Japanese flag detailing Japan’s assistance in restoration work.

The imposing Naastar Darbar which was built after the Shahs conquered Kathmandu in 1769 and used to dominate the complex, and lost its top four floors in the earthquake. This nine-storey brick and timber structure and three other smaller towers surrounding Lokran Chowk, are being rebuilt by the Chinese government. It is not the only pagoda gate at the entrance to the palace complex, the Chinese have also put up exhibits explaining to the public the details of its reconstruction work.

This has led to some other countries which are also involved in restoration. South Korea, for example, has already given a US$100,000 grant for the restoration of the Rani Pokhari in Patan. The Chinese have also covered both sides of their Gaddhi Bhanjyang restoration with huge banners. The European-style neoclassical building suffered heavy damage, and is being rebuilt with a $700,000 grant from the US Ambassador’s Fund for Cultural Preservation with the Miyamoto Disaster Relief Fund carrying out the restoration. Japan is mainly responsible for the restoration of the Agam Chhen and Hanuman Ghat, and appears to be far ahead of the other two donors in taking credit for its restoration project.

Heritage experts say Nepal has always rebuilt its monuments after earthquakes that have struck Kathmandu Valley every century or so. When it comes to donor offer of support, it seems modern Nepal just cannot say a polite ‘no, thank you’ we can do this ourselves’. A larger worry is that after giving the permission for restoration, the Department of Archeology (DoA) has taken a back seat in ensuring that the projects comply with heritage reconstruction guidelines. In 1979, the architecture firm of John S. Colley used steel beams instead of traditional timber in renovating the Naastar Darbar to strengthen the structure, but the palace collapsed anyway in 2015. Some architects reckon the building may have withstood the 7.8 magnitude shaking if traditional timber joints were used, giving it more flexibility. Architect and historian Sudhanshu Raj Tharst visited the Naastar Darbar recently, and says the Chinese were about to repeat the mistake of using steel columns. He says the Chinese

Bhaktapur shows the

SUYYOG PRAJAPATI

Bhaktapur has always been known for the unique architecture of its medieval squares and buildings. But the 2015 earthquake destroyed nearly a quarter of its ancient city, including monuments in its famous palace square.

Nearly three years later, with its well-defined guidelines, economic sources and a trained workforce, Bhaktapur is steadily rebuilding itself. Unlike in Kathmandu where foreign donors are competing with each other to help reconstruct (see above), here it is the municipality and the locals that have taken charge.

After the earthquake, many donors pledged monetary support for the recovery of the heritage sites in Kathmandu Valley including Bhaktapur, which was originally restored under a German project in the 1970s. Various international organisations, China and Japan expressed interest to rebuild the entire city. The German government in fact wanted to build another Bhaktapur Development Project in the 1980s and 90s,” recalls Surya Shrestha Koirala, a senior engineer at the Heritage Conservation Unit in Bhaktapur Durbar Square. The Germans wanted to return to Bhaktapur, where many of the monuments had already been restored 40 years ago without the earthquake, and they tried to convince the local authorities here to allow them to support another urban renewal project.

The municipality decided the offer and decided to rebuild the heritage using its own resources, with help from the Department of Archeology (DoA), the Goethe-Institut and the National Reconstruction Authority (NRA).

Even before the earthquake, Bhaktapur municipality had established norms for heritage conservation and restoration. After 2015, reconstruction was delayed for five months because although the NRA had directed new concrete buildings, none were provided for traditional clay-wood structures. The city had to come up with its own guidelines to preserve the old construction methods. Since 2015, the municipality has documented 116 archaeological heritage sites for reconstruction and renovation with monuments on the tourist routes and those promoting tourism business and trade have been given priority for reconstruction.

So far, 23 projects have been implemented, including ten for the monuments in Durbar Square and two in Tathayu Square. The Birlamai and Narayan temples at Tathayu and the three Narayan temples in Baruwa Square have already been completed, three other monuments in Tathayu Square are planned for renovation by next year.
assured him they would henceforth use traditional materials.

Tiwari is a purist when it comes to heritage restoration, and has led high-profile activism against the use of cement and steel in the renovations of Rani Pokhari and Kashmeshwori. He does not approve of the DoA’s heritage reconstruction guidelines that allow the use of modern materials if traditional materials are not available.

“The DoA has not even bothered to check if its own problematic guidelines are being followed,” Tiwari told us. “They just sign MOUs with donors and go to sleep.”

In its defence, the DoA says it is indeed monitoring the heritage reconstruction guidelines through its site office at the Hanuman Dhoka Durbar Museum Development Committee. However, when we asked heritage officer Jaya Narayan Karki at the Committee this week, he revealed he had no mandate to inspect reconstruction.

“We sometimes try to intervene because it is happening in front of our own eyes, but the DoA has not officially asked us to monitor if the Chinese or Americans are following our guidelines,” Karki said.

Heritage conservation activists say it would have been ideal for Nepal to rebuild all its monuments itself like it has done in the past, or like Bhaktapur is doing (see report below). If help was needed, the government should have sought support on condition that the projects were channelized through the DoA and ensured participation of local communities.

The DoA has been reduced to a rubber stamp body and local communities say they do not have a say in the rebuilding process, and don’t know what the foreigners are doing to monuments built by their ancestors.

There have been no public hearings, and there is no local coordination committee. The only information locals get are from the display panels and banners put up by the Chinese and the Americans, with no way to verify if that is how restoration is being carried out.

Architect Atitaa Tamangkar says: “Local communities might not have a sense of ownership of the buildings if they are excluded from the heritage conservation and reconstruction process.”

The stone Vasula Temple, Lahan Dega and Kedarnath Temple in Durbar Square are under construction. Of the total budget for reconstruction, 70% came from the government, 3% from the entry fees of tourists, 16% from taxes, and the remaining from various semi-private sources. Since 2010, 30% of the budget has actually been spent on a yearly basis for reconstruction and maintenance. The DoA has provided Rs400 million.

An Architectural Survey and Reconstruction Committee does the micro-evaluation and reports to both the municipality and DoA. If required, reports ultimately go to the NRA. Senior architects from the Institute of Engineering and Khwopa Engineering College provide technical support to the municipality.

“Only traditional construction materials like wood, brick and lime mortar are used for historic monuments,” says Khob attached. “All the newly reconstructed temples have internal wooden structures that provide flexibility and support.”

The timber comes from Tarai districts and is high-quality sal, hardwood procured through the National Timber Corporation at a set price of Rs400 per cubic foot. Other than lime powder, all raw materials including bricks and stones came from within Nepal. The five-month blockade in 2015 slowed down work, but things have picked up again.

One problem that has been that some skilled craftsmen have left Bhaktapur for better paying jobs elsewhere, but many others are staying behind to train the skills and transfer them to future generations.

Besides the government, private donors have also contributed towards heritage preservation. “The municipality in fact welcomes such undertakings at communal sites,” says Khob attached. “Small temples, rest houses (pados) and minor shrines are being taken care of by local volunteers. Unlike the major heritage sites where tenders are announced and contractors are given tenders, basic preservation work initiated by the community only needs a simple application in order to be approved by the municipality.”

Although this city of 80,000 inhabitants is much smaller in size than historic Kathmandu, the level of enthusiasm and consciousness among the administrators and also among the general public sets Bhaktapur apart. The difference could be even seen before the 2015 disaster, and Bhaktapur offers plenty of lessons on how to manage reconstruction.

way by rebuilding itself
Skeletons in the Cabinet

Since The Ass is not an astrologer, he has taken to consulting Sri Ganga Ram Donkey before sitting down to write this weekly column to answer some of the burning questions of the day. Being a newspaper of record-keeping, I cannot get things wrong, and have to strive for utmost accuracy.

That is why this week, the questions to the fortune teller were naturally the following:

Will North Korea launch another missile? Will low-levelling return this spring? How long will the de-Male and Maudley unity last? Or, who are going to be the lucky loggers who make it to the new Cabinet lineup?

I can now reveal in the strictest confidence what I learnt from the Astrologer General about what the stars have in store for the new Council of Ministers. As expected, the word from Balu Watu is that the alpaca PM and Chairmen are having a hard time with the dammed since the constitution puts a cap on the size of the Cabinet to 48 inches at the waist.

Therefore, the Minister for Industry, Commerce and Over-Supply, and the Minister for Justification and Parliamentary Affairs will, on the recommendation of the prime minister, also look after the Ministry of Irrigation, Population, Environment, Physical Therapy and No Work.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be merged with the Ministry of Illegitimate Affairs under which will fall the Department of Labour and Middletown. The new Ministry of Family Planning and Adulterity will have a strategic partnership with the Ministry of Miscommunication and Disinformation, while also gathering useful gossip from the Directorate of Military Intelligence.

The Ministry of General Administration will, in the absence of the Defensive Minister, also take care of the Ministry of Culture Shock and Tourism. For the time being, through the Prime University, an ET University, an Art Village in Kirtipur, House for the Homeless, Voice for the Voiceless, a Cricket Stadium, a 24-Hour Bar for Journalists, a Bullet Train Service to Hendura through a 5ft-high Tunnel, a Cement Factory in Tundikhel and turn Rattas Park into a Car Park," he said, adding, "nothing is impossible if I have my way." However, on the question of the city’s growing garbage problem, the mayor admitted defeat. Raising both hands, he said: "On garbage, I give up."

In other news: the Ministry of Horning Around has formed a 116-member Steering Committee to organize this year’s Gai Jatra on Tundikhel which, in the interest of the government’s general policy of austerity and belt-tightening will be combined with Gai Jatra, reports RSS.

"The idea is to start lamping our festivals together since there are too many of them anyway," one of the 12 vice-chairmen of the publicity subcommittee whose name begins with "P" said under condition of complete anonymity.

Addressing a press interaction program at the Raptiwn Club, he said several bulls, which had registered their names for the aquatic events and vice-versa, had been disqualified for having fake birth certificates, and would be charge-sheeted in due course.

Instead of the cavalry making gravity-defying jumps over Armored Personnel Carriers in the Obstacles Event, participating water buffaloes this year would be required to take part in a paragliding contest by jumping off helicopters above Tundikhel.

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